

Reflection

Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate

Joliet, IL

Sr. Barbara Kwiatkowski, OSF

By: Sr. Jeanne Bessette, OSF, Monday, January 12, 2026

THAT gospel! This was the gospel passage Barbara Ann Kwiatkowski chose for herself. Listen to Jesus again: "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if she dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." He asks Martha, sister of Lazarus, "Do you believe this?" Jesus asked Barb that same question, over and over again throughout her life. And I'm confident that her answer was the same as Martha's: "Yes, Lord." Barbara, woman of faith, woman of hope, woman of compassion, and tenacity and fortitude and song and integrity, this was a woman who knew how to live. She lived a life of generosity and one filled with strength. She strove to be a woman who acted out of love for God and for others.

Some of us know this for a fact, and others know it without knowing all the details, but Barb during the course of her life, saved lives. She saved the lives of others. She did it as a teacher and dean of students, accompanying students, colleagues and parents through some life-altering events. She walked with the dying and the bereaved. She comforted the confused and the bereft. To her colleagues, Barb knew how to be a great listener and a caring friend.

In her family, Barb knew how to live as a loving daughter, a supportive sister, an attentive and proud aunt. She missed her father who died too young. She cared for her mother until her dying day. She was proud of her sisters Susan and Kathy and loved being with them. You nieces and nephews have no idea how much we know

about YOU because of all of Barb's stories! She loved watching Jennifer and Christopher grow into the adults you are today. Among other tidbits, we know about Caelyn's dance achievements; we know about a pet snake named Mr. Snuggles. (Owen)

As a Franciscan sister, Barb knew how to be sister to others. She nursed us through terrible illnesses and losses. She coaxed estranged sisters back to the community. And she accompanied us to get help for addictions and emotional hurts. She journeyed with women discerning a call to religious life.

We will all have the opportunity to share memories after mass today, but I would like to tell a few myself to shed light on the Barb I knew. You know, we spent countless hours together – among other places – in the choir loft at Our Lady of Angels, especially during funerals. Before, after and occasionally during the funerals – forgive us, Lord – we often talked about life and death. I'll share three frequent topics.

The first is the promise we made to one another that we would give the reflection at one another's funerals. And then we'd laugh because that wouldn't be possible. But it was the spirit and commitment that counted.

The second is Barb said many, many times that we should be recording our sisters choir. She was worried that when it was time for our funerals, there would not be anyone to sing.

(Well, Barb, many of us are still together for yours – and we are trying our best to give you some beautiful music to send you off, even as we miss your voice among us.)

And thirdly, we often mused that every time a sister died, whoever offered the reflection pretty much turned her into a saint, gliding over missteps and foibles, and focusing on the good she did in her life. Barb would say, “Will anyone think I was a good person when I’m gone?” And I would laugh and say, “Absolutely. You’ll be a saint because I will make stuff up about you.”

Remember again what Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if she dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” We are incredibly sad that Barb died much sooner than she or anyone wanted.

Still, she made excellent use of the 72 years God gave her.

- 72 years of singing sublime hymns and Motown favorites. (Sisters, remember her singing *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* at one of our chapters? Full-on Motown!)
- 72 years of living her proud Polish heritage.
- 72 years of doing every single thing with full fervor.
- 72 years of “stirring into flame the gifts” God had given her.
- 72 years of praying and leading others in prayer.
- 72 years of trying her best to “Fill the world with love,” as her favorite song says.

And at the end, Barb was not afraid to die. Disappointed yes, but not afraid because Barb fully embraced the Resurrection. She was confident that she would see her many loved ones who had gone before her again. And she was confident that leaving this earth was not the end of her living.

As the first day of the new year 2026 was coming to a close, Barb’s voice would be stilled, but her presence among us, her influences and words, her actions and achievements will live on in our memories. She died as she lived – believing in the God who called her before she was born and who called her again to more than a new year – a new life.

So, Babs, you may not have been a saint, but you were pretty darned close. And I didn’t even have to make anything up.

Sr. Jeanne Bessette, OSF
Mass of Christian Burial
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